



5 August 2024

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Ref: OIA-2024/25-0031

Dear [Redacted]

Official Information Act request for communications with and information mentioning Emeritus Professor Warren Tate

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 11 July 2024. You requested:

“Please provide me with a copy of all communications and information between Emeritus Professor Warren Tate and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet between 1 November 2021 and 26 September 2022. Please provide me with a copy of all communications and information that mention Emeritus Professor Warren Tate between 1 November 2021 and 26 September 2022.”

Please find attached a copy of an open letter dated 26 April 2022 from “Vaccines Plus NZ” to the then Prime Minister, Minister of Health and Minister for COVID-19 Response. Emeritus Professor Warren Tate was one of the signatories to this letter.

We have searched our records, and this is the only information in scope of your request identified as being held by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

For completeness, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

This response may be published on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet’s website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted Signature]

Clare Ward
Executive Director
Strategy, Governance and Engagement Group

26th April 2022

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
Prime Minister

Hon Chris Hipkins
Minister for COVID-19 Response

Hon Andrew Little
Minister of Health

cc Associate Ministers Verrall, Henare
and Sio

By email: j.ardern@ministers.govt.nz c.hipkins@ministers.govt.nz a.little@ministers.govt.nz

Tēnā koutou Prime Minister and Ministers Hipkins and Little,

Thank you for the Government's dedicated and evidenced-based response to the COVID-19 pandemic thus far. We request that you urgently consider the following recommendations for the implementation of a strengthened **Vaccines Plus** mitigation strategy.

Executive Summary of Recommendations

- Implement and communicate a comprehensive **Vaccines Plus** mitigation strategy with the aim of maintaining low COVID-19 infection rates.
- Increase public education about airborne transmission.
- Recommend, and aid in the supply of N95-type masks for the public.
- Continue the school mask mandate over winter 2022.
- Supply CO2 monitoring and air filtration units to all school classrooms.
- Allow for alternative school learning arrangements during times of intense transmission.
- Produce updated expert ventilation and air quality guidelines for public indoor spaces.
- Continue to enable higher vaccination rates for children, and booster doses.

Vaccines Plus: to limit COVID-19 transmission

We the undersigned doctors and scientists, call on the New Zealand Government to adopt a comprehensive mitigation strategy, to minimise the negative health and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This goal is best achieved by maintaining low COVID-19 transmission and infection rates through implementation of an evidence-informed **Vaccines Plus** strategy, that combines high vaccination coverage with effective public health and social measures.

COVID-19 is a novel pathogen that can repeatedly infect, with infection resulting in an increased risk of many serious long-term health complications for people of all ages. It is evident that vaccination alone will not be enough to fully protect our communities from high rates of COVID infection and the resulting complications.

Relying on 'personal responsibility', without effective public health measures, will result in repeated waves of infection, an overloaded and dysfunctional healthcare system, and ongoing disruption to daily life. This scenario is currently playing out around the world. Instead, a collective approach is required that focuses on minimising transmission by means of public health policies. These measures should be viewed as protections rather than restrictions, and when combined with a high vaccination rate, would encompass a **Vaccines Plus** strategy.

A public health based, **Vaccines Plus** approach favours the safety of all, especially marginalised communities who may lack access to resources needed to protect themselves. Groups particularly at risk when community transmission is high include children, the elderly, Māori and Pasifika, and people who are medically vulnerable or disabled.

Vaccines Plus: actions to take now

COVID-19 spreads predominantly by airborne transmission, therefore, to minimise infections public health policies must aim to provide clean air within indoor environments. The evidence for this conclusion is extensive.

To this end, we urge the New Zealand Government to implement the following, as part of a **Vaccines Plus** strategy:

- Define, and clearly communicate to the public, a coherent mitigation strategy with well-defined goals. It is essential that this strategy recognises that the best outcomes for individuals and society will be achieved by maintaining low infection rates.
- Increase public education on the nature and predominance of airborne transmission of COVID-19, including the factors that increase risk, and how to mitigate these risks.
- Identify appropriate high-quality masks for public use (currently N95/P2/KN95/KF94) and inform the public that these masks are greatly superior to surgical masks. Ensure procurement and funding to avoid inequity of supply, including to schools. **This policy must include the ongoing mandating of mask use in schools over the winter terms in 2022.**
- Strengthen school indoor air quality measures by supplying all classrooms with,
 1. CO2 monitoring to objectively assess the adequacy of ventilation, and
 2. Appropriately sized HEPA air filtration units in time for winter 2022, until such time as ventilation has been deemed adequate to prevent infection, by quantitative assessment.

- Provide alternative learning arrangements and community-based support for school-aged children when necessary, to protect them and their families during periods of intense transmission. New Zealand needs to adopt a whānau-centred approach that protects the well-being of children and their families in all settings.
- Engage engineers, aerosol scientists and other ventilation specialists to develop clear ventilation standards for indoor public spaces, including standards for air changes, airborne pathogen filtration and inactivation, and maximum acceptable CO2 levels.
- Continue to actively promote and enable high vaccination coverage for all groups of society, including children, who currently have low vaccination rates.

The implications of continuing to allow poorly-mitigated transmission of COVID-19 in New Zealand are too great to ignore. The burden of long term illness and disability on individuals, whānau, and our health system of Covid and Long COVID will include effects on the cardiovascular, respiratory, neurological, endocrine, and immune systems.

Recurrent waves of infection caused by waning immunity, new variants, and the premature removal of public health controls, would lead to an over-burdened healthcare system that would struggle to provide even standard services.

COVID-19 is a highly infectious disease, but transmission is preventable. As previously outlined, there are inexpensive and highly effective strategies for suppressing infection rates, that will work in the background to keep people safe as they go about their daily lives. We believe these measures can create a 'covid-hostile' environment in New Zealand that would protect us not only from new variants, but also from other airborne respiratory infections.

In the face of high uncertainty about the future course and long-term impacts of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, New Zealand can again be a world leader if we embrace a comprehensive public health based, **Vaccines Plus** strategy.

Ngā mihi nui

Dr Kelvin Ward
MBChB FRNZCUC DipCEM PGCertCPU
Urgent Care Physician

Dr Amanda Kvalsvig
MBChB MRCPCH(London) PhD
Epidemiologist
University of Otago, Wellington

Professor Michael Baker
MBChB DPH DObs FAFPHM FNZCPHM FRACMA
University of Otago

Dr Anna Brooks
BCA BSc(Hons) PhD
Immunologist, University of Auckland

Dr Sandhya Ramanathan
BSc (Med) MBBS (Hons) DCH FRACGP FRNZCGP
Specialist General Practitioner

Dr Joel Rindelaub
PhD
Aerosol Chemist
University of Auckland

Dr David Welch
PhD
Computational Biologist
University of Auckland

Dr Rawiri Keenan
MBChB, FRNZCGP
General Practitioner
University of Waikato

Terry Taylor
BSc DipMLS MNZIMLS
Specialist Medical Laboratory Scientist
President NZIMLS

Dr David Gollogly
MBChB FRNZCUC
Urgent Care Physician

Signatories (26.4.22)

Emeritus Professor Warren Tate, BSc MSc(Hons) PhD FRSNZ CNZM, Scientist-Biomedical, University of Otago; **Professor Rod Jackson**, BSc MBChB MMedSc DObs DCH PhD FNZCPHM, Epidemiologist and Public Health Physician, University of Auckland; **Professor Chris Bullen**, MBChB DObst DCH MPH PhD FNZCPHM FAFPHM, Public Health Medicine, University of Auckland; **Professor Nick Wilson**, MBChB MPH, Professor of Public Health, University of Otago; **Associate Professor Rhys Jones**, MBChB MPH FNZCPHM, University of Auckland; **Associate Professor Elana Curtis**, MD MPH DipPH MBChB BHB FNZCPHM, University of Auckland; **Associate Professor Lance C. Jennings**, QSO, PhD FRCPATH FFSc(RCPA), University of Otago, Christchurch; **Dr Kelvin Walls**, PhD, Engineer & building surveyor; **Dr Julie Bennett**, PhD, Public Health, University of Otago; **Dr Gary Payinda**, MD MA DDU FACEP FACEM, Emergency Medicine Specialist; **Dr Michael Howard**, MD FACEP FACEM, Emergency Consultant, Microbiologist and Immunologist; **Dr Rory Miller**, MBChB FRNZCGP FDRHMNZ, Rural GP and Hospital Medicine, University of Otago; **Dr Garry Nixon**, MD FRNZCGP FDRHMNZ, Rural Health, University of Otago, Dunstan Hospital Central Otago; **Dr Sally Talbot**, MBChB Dip Obst FRNZCGP, Specialist General Practitioner; **Dr Matire Harwood**, MBChB, PhD, MRNZCGP, GP, University of Auckland and Papakura Marae; **Dr Alison Leversha**, BHB MBChB DipObs FRACP(Paeds) MPH PhD, Paediatrician, University of Auckland; **Dr Ruth Sinclair**, MBChB FRACP Neonatal Paediatrician; **Dr Jin Russell**, MBChB DipPaed FRACP Community and Developmental Paediatrician, University of Auckland; **Associate Professor Siouxsie Wiles**, PhD, Microbiologist, University of Auckland; **Dr Alice Tait-Jamieson**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Catherine Hurd**, BSc MD CCFP FRNZCGP; **Dr Pamela Eccles**, MBChB FANZCA FFPANZCA, Anaesthetist, Pain Medicine Specialist; **Dr Indran Ramanathan**, MBBS PhD FRACS, Cardiothoracic Surgeon; **Dr Miranda McEwan**, BSc(Hons) MBChB PhD, General Practice; **Dr Cathy White**, MBChB FRCGP; **Dr Louise Kuegler**, MBChB FRNZCGP, Specialist General Practitioner; **Dr Kim Williams**, FRNZCGP MRCP(Lond) MRCGP; **Dr Angela Glew**, MA MB BChir MRCGP FRNZCGP General Practitioner; **Dr Vivian Fu**, MBChB PhD FRACP, Neurologist & General Physician; **Dr Danielle Gerrard**, MBChB PGDip Paeds, FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Rebecca**

Randerson, MBChB FRNZCGP DipChildHealth, Specialist General Practitioner; **Dr Pauline Horrill**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Anna Skinner**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Caroline Ryan**, MBChB (Otago) FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Stephanie Taylor**, BPhED (Hons) MBChB FRNZCGP General Practitioner, University of Otago; **Dr Grahame David Jelley**, MBChB FRNZCGP, Specialist General Practitioner, **Dr Landi Cranstoun**, MD Diplomate American Board of Family Medicine; **Dr Laura McAulay**, MBBS MRNZCGP PGcertWH GP Registrar; **Dr Kiyomi Kitagawa**, MB ChB; **Dr Pam Olver**, MBChB, FRNZCGP; **Dr Victoria Jones**, LLB BMBS FRNZCGP; **Dr Brett Hyland**, BHB MBChB FRNZCGP, Specialist GP; **Dr Lorna Archer**, MB BS BSc General Practitioner; **Dr Rebecca Stewart**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Jonathon Phillips**, MBChB, FRNZCGP, GP; **Dr Clare Fisher**, MBChB FRCA FANZCA, Anaesthetist; **Dr Akanksha Bhargava**, MBChB, DCH, FNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Christina McLachlan**, MBChB, FRACP; Dr Yu-Ching Yu, MB ChB DTM&H MPH, GP Registrar; **Dr Annick Depuydt**, MBBS BA FANZCA, Anaesthetist; **Dr Tarun Sharma**, FRNZCGP FRNZCUC, GP and Urgent Care Physician; **Dr Vicki Robertson**, FRANZCOG, Gynaecologist; **Dr Dougal Thorburn**, MBChB, MPH, FRNZCGP ANZCPHM, General Practitioner and Public Health Medicine; **Dr Prabani Wood**, BMBCh, Masters in Public Health BA FRCNZGP; **Dr Gemma Poke**, FRACP; **Dr Pleayo Tovarantonte**, MBChB LLM (Medical Law & Ethics) PGDipSpMed PGCertCAvMed PGDipHlthSrvMgmt, D.D.D; **Dr Andrew Wood**, BM BCh PhD FRACS, ENT Surgeon and Senior Lecturer, Auckland University; **Dr Sonja Bodley**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Raakhi Mistry**, MBChB, General Practice; **Dr Prerna Sehgal**, MBChB (Otago) PG Dip Paed (Auck) BPharm PG Cert Pharm (Otago), Founding President PIHPA; **Dr Karen McIlhone**, MBChB DipPaed MPH; **Dr Atalie Colman**, MBChB FRNZCGP PhD, General Practitioner; **Dr Tina Chou**, MBChB FRNZCGP PGCertCAvMed, General Practitioner; **Dr Karyn Schischka**, MBChB FRNZCUC MRCEM DCH, Urgent Care Physician; **Dr David Davies-Payne**, MBChB FRANZCR, Radiologist; **Dr Vivien Yong**, MBChB FRACP; **Dr Robin Evison**, MD FRNZCUC, Urgent Care Physician; **Dr Barbara Blok**, MBChB FACEM FRNZCUC PGCertCPU PGDipTravMed, Emergency Physician, Urgent Care Physician; **Dr Jasmine MacKay**, BSc MBChB FRNZCUC, Urgent Care Physician; **Dr Kerry Thornbury**, MBChB BSc FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Cheryl Archer**, MBChB FRNZCGP, Specialist General Practitioner; **Dr Nina Bevin**, MBChB MPH MHSci DIH FRNZCGP, General Practitioner and Public Health; **Dr Jasmin Roman**, MD, General Practitioner; **Dr Marama Renata**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Dave McKay**, MBChB, PGDipGP PGDipPalCare FRNZCGP, Palliative Doctor and GP; **Dr Charlotte Harris**, MBChB(Hons) FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Dasna Pallie**, FRNZCGP MBChB, General Practitioner; **Dr Brooke Vosper**, MBChB MRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Lakhminder Sandhu**, FRNZCGP; Dr Dilawar Singh, MBBS FRNZCGP FRNZCUC, General Practitioner and Urgent Care Physician; **Dr Clare Harford**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Vasanthi Bradley**, MBChB General Practitioner; **Dr Jocelyn Wood**, M b B Chir MA (Cantab)FRNZCGP, **Dr Joost Breuk** FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Margaret Field Oakley**, FRNZCGP, Specialist GP; **Dr Donna Lahood**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Jason Kohamutunga Tuhoe**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner, University of Auckland; **Dr Sivanadiyan Nachiappan**, MBBS FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Claire Russell**, MBBS FRNZCGP FRNZCUC, Urgent Care Clinician, CD WDHB COVID Directorate; **Dr Susanna Kent**, MBChB FRNZCGP Dip Forensic Med Dip Obs Dip Clin Nutrition, GP and Forensic Physician; **Dr Kirsten Tucker**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Kerry Macaskill-Smith**, MBChB FRNZCGP DEEM DipPaeds, Otago University;

Dr Rhondda Turner, MBChB Dip Obs FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Michael Loten**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Claire Coddington**, MRCP MRCGP FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Helen Fulcher**, MBChB, DipPaed, PGCertHsc (Sports Med), FRNZCGP; **Dr Ruth Cameron**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Rozanna Latif**, MBChB, GP; **Dr Katrina Kirikino**, MBChB FRNZCGP Dip Obs Dip Paeds, General Practitioner; **Dr Leanne Ashley**, MBChB, FRNZCGP, NZSCM GP and cosmetic medicine doctor; **Dr Lucy Telfar Barnard**, MA(Hons) PhD, Epidemiologist, University of Otago, Wellington; **Dr Kim Burgess**, MBChB DPH FRNZCGP General Practitioner; **Dr Jessie Anderson**, MBChB FRNZCGP General Practitioner; **Dr Jennifer Summers**, PhD AKC DHMSA PGDPH PGCAP BSc CStat FHEA MRSNZ, Epidemiologist, University of Otago, Wellington; **Dr Dermot Coffey**, FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Geraldine Tennent**, FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Anita Mudaliar**, MRCGP FRNZCGP General Practitioner; **Dr Herman van Kradenburg**, MBChB Dip Occ Med (cum laude) FRNZCGP, Consultant Specialist GP, Occupational Medicine Practitioner; **Dr Neilenuo Nelly Rentta**, MBBS, Diplomate of the National Board (DNB) General Surgery, DPH, Public Health, University of Otago; **Dr Sarah McArthur**, MBChB PGDip Child Health - General Practice; **Dr Shona Roberts**, MBBS FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Gillian Yardley**, BSc MbChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Naera Waters**, MBChB FRACP, Medical Oncologist; **Dr Janet Hayward**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Maaik Mewe**, FRNZCGP Specialist GP; **Dr Helen Wood**, MBChB FRNZCGP, Specialist General Practitioner; **Dr Liz Humm**, MBChB FRNZCGP General Practitioner, **Dr Beth McDonald**, MBChB General Practice; **Dr Vicki Shaw**, MBChB, Youth Health; **Dr Holly Pittar**, MBChB DCH, House Officer; **Dr May Ching Soh**, MBChB FRACP PhD, Rheumatologist & Obstetric Physician, University of Auckland; **Dr Caroline Shorter**, PhD (Medicine), Wellington Asthma Research Group, University of Otago; **Dr Olivia Hill**, MBChB; **Dr Jonathan Kennedy**, FRNZCGP MBChB DPH DCH Dip Obs BSc, General Practitioner & Senior Lecturer, University of Otago; **Dr Phillipa Dodds**, MBChB General Practitioner; **Dr Julie-Anne Bell**, MBBS, MRCP FRCPath, Haematologist; **Dr Aimee Rondel**, MBChB FRNZCGP; **Nora Parore**, BPharm, PGCertClinPharm, PGDipClinPharm, Doctoral Candidate, Pharmacist/Kaupapa Māori Health Researcher; **Dr Heather Powell**, MBBS Bsc Trop Dip, Rural Hospital/GP; **Dr Ashleigh Jensen**, MBChB, BSc, PGDip Surg Anat. Radiology Trainee; **Dr Rowena Woodhams**, MBChB DCH, General Practice Registrar; **Lesley Gray**, FFPH MPH MSc; University of Otago, Wellington; **Dr Myrto Kenny**, MBChB, MRNZCGP, GP; **Dr Catherine Chan**, MBChB FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Katherine Bloomfield**, BSc MBChB FRACP, Geriatrician, University of Auckland; **Dr Keith Colvine**, MBChB FRACP, Rheumatologist and General Physician; **Dr Dalilah Restrepo**, Infectious Diseases Specialist, MidCentral DHB; **Dr Monika Pradhan**, MBBS MS DOMS FCPS MRCOphth, Ophthalmology; **Dr Sharon Gardiner**, PhD, Antimicrobial Stewardship Pharmacist; **Dr Alicia Didsbury**, PhD, Immunologist, University of Auckland; **Dr Olivia Tan**, FRNZCGP, MBChB, General Practitioner; **Dr Thomas Wong**, MBChB, Infectious Diseases and Geriatrics; **Dr Tim Cunningham**, MBChB, DipObst FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Anna Cherry**, MBBCh, FRNZCGP, General Practitioner; **Dr Danuta Amelung**, BHB MbChB FRNZCGP Specialist General Practitioner; **Dr Maritza Farrant**, MBChB MPH FRACP Endocrine Fellow; **Dr James Lello**, MBChB DCH MMedSci FRNZCGP, Medical Educator, Senior lecturer, University of Auckland; **Dr Tracy Ball**, MBChB MRCGP FRNZCGP General Practitioner; **Dr Joyce Chan**, FRNZCGP, MBChB, Dip Paeds; **Dr Stephen Streat**, FRACP, Intensivist;